



Hosford Square in Lowell's Back Central Neighborhood

3

NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE



Goal Statement

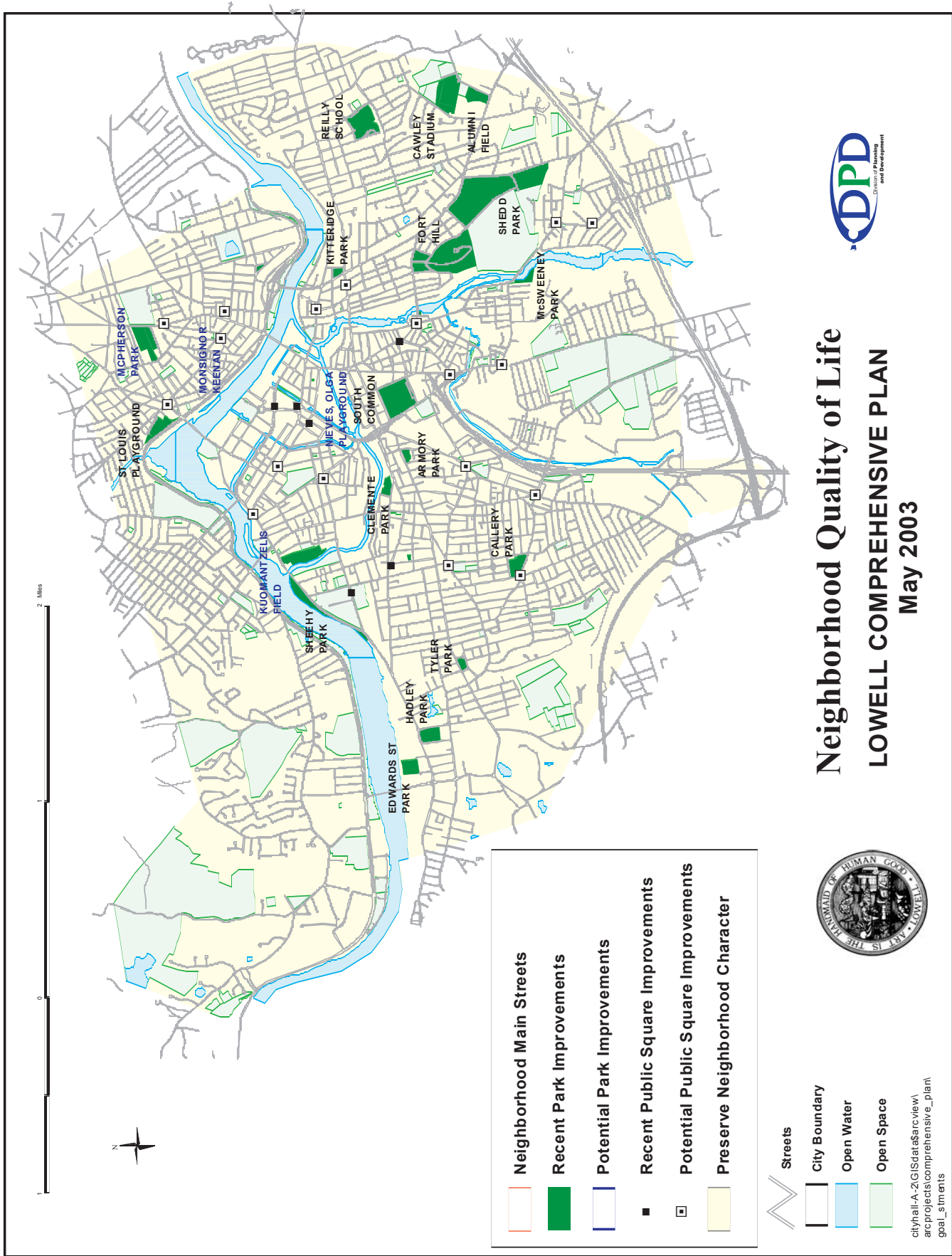
Lowell will have safe, desirable, and vibrant neighborhoods with active and scenic business districts, public squares, and community parks that evoke a sense of place and convey their cultural and historic significance.

From its birth as a mill City, Lowell has always been a pioneering community and a uniquely attractive place to live. The City of Lowell has a strong network of traditional urban neighborhoods with great historic and cultural significance. Lowell prides itself on offering countless residential amenities - often associated with larger cities - while maintaining a small-town atmosphere. To build on its recent success, Lowell must continue to emphasize the character and amenities of its urban neighborhoods.

Lowell's residents have voiced a strong concern for the character of their neighborhoods. In the resident survey that was completed to support this plan, neighborhood character was identified as a top priority when selecting a community, ranking third behind police and safety and schools, but ahead of cost of living, housing, job opportunities, and all other factors. All demographic segments shared this priority. As a result, protecting and promoting neighborhood character is a core goal of this Master Plan.

Since its inception, Lowell has been a port of entry for new immigrants from around the world looking for a better way of life. These new arrivals have helped to shape the character of the City's neighborhoods, and remain an integral part of Lowell's past and future. Diversity has always been key to Lowell's identity, and the City must work to maintain a population characterized by a diversity of incomes and backgrounds as an essential component of the community's character and revitalization.

Over the next 20 years, Lowell will focus on protecting and improving streetscapes, neighborhood commercial centers, natural areas, and public squares, as well as public safety, education, recreation, and other municipal services, so that it may continue to enhance and promote the historic and cultural character of its neighborhoods and provide a high quality of life for current and future generations. Lowell will also focus on minimizing, regulating, and managing infill development and its impacts on established neighborhood character. By enhancing the appearance, pedestrian amenities, and distinctiveness of its neighborhoods, Lowell will foster a sense of solidarity and pride among residents, strengthening community bonds, reducing behaviors such as crime and littering, and encouraging residents to become involved in protecting the character of their neighborhoods.



Neighborhood Quality of Life LOWELL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN May 2003



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3.1 Recommendations and Action Steps

3.1.1 THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF EACH OF LOWELL'S NEIGHBORHOODS SHOULD BE PRESERVED AND ENHANCED.

Action Step: Work with neighborhood residents and leaders to identify significant characteristics of each neighborhood to be preserved, protected, and enhanced.

Action Step: Explore local adoption of the Community Preservation Act as a tool for protecting and strengthening neighborhood character, as well as affordable housing.

Action Step: Implement greater design review procedures and provide for enforcement of those procedures to oversee development activity within existing neighborhood contexts, including new construction, subdivisions, off-street parking, site landscaping, signage, and major commercial renovations.

**Figure 3-2
Suburban Streetscape**



Action Step: Expand programs offered by Lowell's Historic Board that provide technical assistance and guidance to better serve the needs of neighborhood business districts and residential property owners, as well as advisory design review in neighborhood historic districts.

Action Step: Rezone areas in which present zoning promotes uses that are not compatible with existing neighborhood character.

Action Step: Work with the Board of Health to adopt standardized regulations for waste disposal that address dumpster location, screening, and pick-up times for commercial and large multifamily properties.

**Figure 3-1
Contemporary Townhouses**



Action Step: Work with the state legislature to enable and adopt local option property tax abatement for owner-occupied and historic residential structures. With the adoption of this ordinance or by-law, owners that undertake substantial rehabilitation efforts or exterior rehabilitation work that improves neighborhood appearance could apply for a phased-in assessment increase - 20 percent over a period of five years - that would encourage maintenance, upkeep, and stability.

**Figure 3-3
Older Urban Neighborhoods**



3.1.2 REBUILD THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CITY'S NEIGHBORHOODS, FOCUSING ON THE MAIN INTERSECTIONS AS SERVICE CENTERS OF EACH NEIGHBORHOOD, SETTING A STANDARD FOR STREETScape ENHANCEMENT OF BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROPERTY.

Figure 3-4
Improving Main Intersections: Dover Square



Action Step: Improve the appearance, safety, and infrastructure condition of focal public squares and other high-profile locations in the neighborhoods through capital projects to redesign and reconstruct these areas following the model of Hosford and Dover Squares.

Action Step: Establish a maintenance endowment for the continued upkeep of these focal areas.

3.1.3 STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICTS AS LOCAL HUBS OF ACTIVITY THAT INSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF GOODS AND SERVICES WITHIN EASY WALKING DISTANCE OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS.

Action Step: Establish a "Main Street" revitalization program for these areas that partners with existing merchants and area residents in concerted marketing; physical enhancements to buildings, signage and streetscapes; business recruitment; parking management; and collective service delivery contracting to improve their long-term viability.

Figure 3-6
Thriving Business District in Cambridge



Figure 3-5
Centralville Business District



Action Step: Expand attractive retail and commercial loan programs available to both building owners and retailers.

Action Step: Expand and improve the City's technical assistance services and grants/loans to its local minority businesses.

Action Step: Increase the mix of specialty and ethnic stores that suit the daily needs of the surrounding neighborhoods.

3.1.4 PUBLIC SAFETY MUST BE MAINTAINED AND IMPROVED AS A PREREQUISITE FOR PROTECTING THE VIABILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF LOWELL'S NEIGHBORHOODS.

**Figure 3-7
Centralville Neighborhood
Precinct**



Action Step: Support the Police Department in efforts to develop and expand Community Policing Initiatives throughout the City that will help to deter crime and promote positive activities in Lowell's neighborhoods and Downtown.

Action Step: Partner with the Police Department to identify specific problem sites or facilities and work to improve the physical environment of these areas.

Action Step: Encourage design practices throughout the City of Lowell that help to discourage criminal activity.

Action Step: Work with the Police Department to develop a media strategy to decrease the perception of crime in Lowell's neighborhoods and balance the sensationalizing of gang and crime activity by the media.

3.1.5 LOWELL'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS MUST BE MAINTAINED AND IMPROVED AS A PREREQUISITE FOR PROTECTING THE VIABILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF LOWELL'S NEIGHBORHOODS.

Action Step: Support Lowell Public Schools in efforts to reduce class sizes, increase MCAS test scores, and boost academic achievement levels.

Action Step: Provide each graduate of Lowell's Public Schools with the necessary skills to be able to compete in the regional workplace, find a well-paid job, or advance to higher education, if desired.

Action Step: Work with Lowell Public Schools to develop a media strategy that emphasizes the positive achievements and accomplishments of local students.

**Figure 3-8
The New Butler Elementary School**



3.1.6 LIMIT INFILL DEVELOPMENTS TO PROJECTS THAT ARE SENSITIVE TO THE CONTEXT OF THE EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD.

Action Step: Revise subdivision regulations to allow for creative solutions to allow small (2-5) lot infill subdivisions to be less intrusive on existing neighborhood fabric.

Action Step: Combine greater design review with a streamlining of redundant board review processes and greater regulatory flexibility where appropriate.

Figure 3-9
Well-Conceived Residential Infill



Figure 3-10
Poorly-Conceived Residential Infill



Action Step: Reduce density and types of residential uses permitted in established single-family and two-family residential areas to better conform to the existing residential character of these neighborhoods.

Action Step: Encourage denser residential development in the downtown, as well as near waterfronts, recreational areas, and transportation infrastructure where its impact on established neighborhoods will be minimized.

Action Step: Prepare examples of attractive, cost-effective designs for urban infill housing that complement the existing character in established neighborhoods to be used by City staff and review boards to guide both public and private infill development.

3.1.7 DECREASE THE PERCEPTION THAT PARKING OPPORTUNITIES ARE LIMITED AND UNATTAINABLE IN NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICTS.

Action Step: Develop a system of car condos for residents and small public parking lots for businesses in the neighborhoods with care taken to regulate design, planting, and size to protect neighborhood character. Locate these lots where they will actually support the intended uses.

Action Step: Improve the enforcement of current parking regulations.

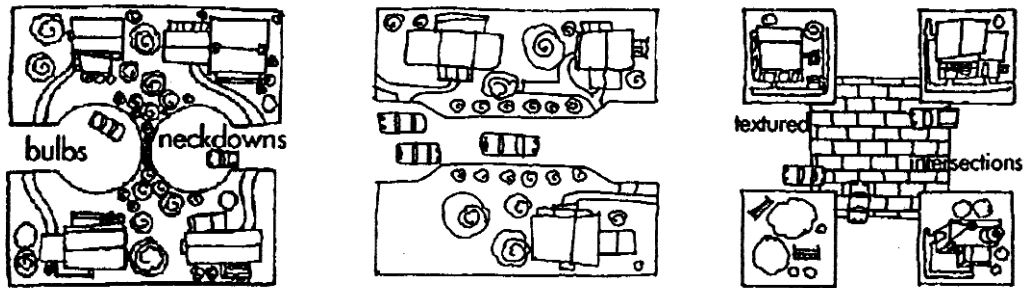
Action Step: Insure that all new development adequately accommodates and minimizes its parking demand through the provision of off-street parking and employment of transportation demand management strategies.

Figure 3-11
Neighborhood Car Condo



3.1.8 MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF AUTOMOBILE USAGE ON NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE.

Figure 3-12
Traffic Calming Strategies



Action Step: Implement traffic calming procedures throughout Lowell's neighborhoods.

Action Step: Reduce automobile dependence among neighborhood residents by increasing access to public transportation and utilizing neighborhood business districts to increase pedestrian activity.

Figure 3-13
A Sea of Asphalt



Figure 3-14
Parking Area with Green Space



Action Step: Use plant materials to buffer residential areas from traffic noise and to visually screen parking areas.

Action Step: Reduce automobile dependence by promoting shopping opportunities for residents in neighborhood business districts.

3.1.9 IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE AND/OR EXPAND RECREATIONAL PARKS IN CENTRALVILLE, THE LOWER HIGHLANDS, BACK CENTRAL, AND OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS IN WHICH PRESENT PARK USAGE AND DEMAND VASTLY EXCEED AVAILABLE RECREATIONAL RESOURCES.

Action Step: Expand well-utilized existing parks where adjacent public and quasi-public lands can be used for this purpose.

Action Step: Improve access to and usage of regional recreational areas, including the State Forest, waterfront greenways, and recreational trails by all City residents through the provision of safe and desirable recreational pathways connecting these areas to other neighborhoods in Lowell.

Action Step: Improve existing recreational areas for increased usage by residents of all ages.

Action Step: Promote the expansion of available park land and open space through the dedication of surplus public property to not-for-profit land trusts.

Action Step: Partner with neighborhood associations to find solutions to the unique recreation and open space needs of Lowell's neighborhoods.

**Figure 3-15
Hadley Park**



3.1.10 PROTECT LARGER AREAS OF CONTIGUOUS OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL AREAS WHERE DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES ON GREEN AREAS THREATEN EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER.

Action Step: Develop a greenway system, including a neighborhood trail, between the State Forest and the north bank of the Merrimack River.

**Table 3-1
Recreational Land by Neighborhood**

Neighborhood	Population	Existing Open Space (acres)	Open Space Target (acres)
The Acre (Tracts 3107, 3108, 3110, 3111)	12,072	18	82-133
Back Central (Tracts 3119, 3120)	5,643	28	35-59
Belvidere / South Lowell (Tracts 3123, 3124, 3125)	15,924	116	100-167
Centralville (Tracts 3102, 3103, 3104)	15,808	65	99-166
Downtown (Tract 3101)	3,881	2	24-41
Highlands (Tracts 3112-3118)	29,631	65	185-311
Pawtucketville (Tracts 3105, 3106)	14,355	95	90-145
Sacred Heart (Tract 3122)	4,741	26	30-49

Source: City of Lowell Existing Conditions Report (2002)

Action Step: Identify and conserve significant parcels in public ownership but that are not presently protected, especially in Pawtucketville, the Highlands, and along the Concord River.

Action Step: Utilize conservation subdivision and planned residential development designs for sensitive parcels to insure that even as privately held lands are subdivided or developed, critical quantities of contiguous open space are retained.

3.1.11 UTILIZE WATERWAYS AND WATERFRONT OPEN SPACES AS FOCAL POINTS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITY AND CHARACTER BY ENHANCING PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Action Step: Enhance the visibility of waterways from neighboring public streets and squares, strengthening their connection to existing neighborhoods and improving the real and perceived safety of waterfront areas.

Action Step: Expand and integrate the network of walkways along the canals and rivers as recreational and functional pedestrian and bicycle transportation corridors.

Action Step: Implement and fully fund the multi-party agreement to insure that the canals are properly and regularly cleaned.

**Figure 3-16
Scenic Pathway Along the Merrimack River**



3.1.12 INCREASE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION AMONG LOWELL'S RESIDENTS TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY AND PROTECT NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER.

Action Step: Support active neighborhood and civic organizations.

Action Step: Utilize the Internet and technology to improve communication among residents and with the City government, especially for people with limited spare time through the creation of a neighborhood forum listserv, and by posting a calendar of community and municipal events and activities on the City of Lowell's website.

Action Step: Encourage neighborhood organizations to expand focus beyond parochial concerns to also include attention to issues of broader civic impact and benefit.